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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION
OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES
UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION

Thirteenth periodic reports of States parties due in 1994

Addendum

BELARUS*

[27 October 1994]

* The present document contains the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth periodic reports which were due on 7 May 1990, 1992 and 1994 respectively. For the ninth and tenth periodic reports of Belarus, and the summary records of the meetings at which the Committee considered those reports, see documents CERD/C/149/Add.5 (ninth periodic report), CERD/C/172/Add.15 (tenth periodic report) and CERD/C/SR.792 and SR.879.

CONTENTS

		Page
Introduction		3
Part I.	General	3
Part II.	Detailed information on the implementation of articles 2-7 of the Convention	4
	Article 2	4
	Article 3	6
	Article 4	7
	Article 5	11
	Article 6	11
	Article 7. A. Education and teaching	12
	B. Culture	13
	C. Information policy	16

Eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth periodic reports of the Republic of Belarus on measures to give effect to the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

Introduction

The Government of the Republic of Belarus hereby submits the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth periodic reports of Belarus on measures to give effect to the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, in accordance with article 9.1 of the Convention. This document covers the reports which were due in 1990, 1992 and 1994. It contains information on measures adopted by the Republic of Belarus, due account being taken of the questions put by members of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination at the time of the submission of the tenth periodic report.

Part I

General

For a long time Belarus's nationalities policy, like that of the other republics of the former USSR, was aimed at integrating the different nations and nationalities into a single whole - the Soviet people. Such a policy was inevitable in a multinational republic, and as a result, the culture, language, national traditions and customs, not just of Belarusians, but of representatives of other nationalities, took second place.

The changes that have occurred in the life of the State and the community in recent years have led to a change in the nature of Belarus's nationalities policy as a sovereign country, which is now aimed at ensuring the free development of national communities, both large and small.

Article 8 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus reads: "The Republic of Belarus shall recognize the priority of generally recognized principles of international law and shall ensure that its legislation is consistent with them". Many articles of the Constitution, particularly in section II, "The individual, society and the State", reflect to a considerable extent the corresponding provisions in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights and the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

All citizens of the Republic of Belarus are equal before the law.

Foreigners and stateless persons resident in the Republic enjoy the rights and freedoms set forth in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, the Declaration of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus "On the State sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus", the Act of the Republic of Belarus "On national minorities in the Republic of Belarus" and other pieces of legislation.

All organs of the State, within the limits of their jurisdiction, as determined by their status, and within their sphere of competence, guarantee

and protect human rights and freedoms as the highest social values. This was the aim behind the adoption of the Act of the Republic of Belarus "On the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus" and the actual establishment of the Court, whose basic function is to check that Belarus's laws, international treaty obligations and other commitments are in conformity with the Constitution and with the international legal instruments ratified by the Republic of Belarus. If the Court finds that they violate human rights and freedoms, it has the right to declare them to have been legally invalid in whole or in part from the time of their adoption (Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, arts. 127 and 128).

Judicial protection of rights and freedoms is guaranteed. Any citizen who considers that his rights have been violated is entitled to appeal to a judicial authority. Justice is administered in the Republic on the basis of the equality of citizens before the law and the courts, regardless of their origin, social or property status, race or nationality, sex, education, language, attitude to religion, or other circumstances. This is spelt out in article 9 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Republic of Belarus and article 6 of the Code of Civil Procedure of the Republic of Belarus.

Special protection is afforded to citizens of the Republic of Belarus, foreign citizens and stateless persons who were victims of political repression in the period between the 1920s and the 1980s, having had criminal proceedings brought against them in the Republic of Belarus by judicial or non-judicial authorities for political, social, national, religious or other reasons.

Part II

Detailed information on the implementation of articles 2-7 of the Convention

Article 2

Having declared itself opposed to all forms of racial discrimination, the Republic of Belarus is responsible for giving effect to the provisions of the Convention and will never allow any persecution on racial grounds by any person or group of persons. In no circumstances will our country encourage, protect or support any person or group of persons advocating racial discrimination.

Recently, substantial amendments and additions have been made to a number of pieces of Belarusian legislation. For example, measures are being taken to make the criminal law more humane. Thus the Acts of 14 November 1991 and 23 April 1992 "On the introduction of amendments and additions in certain legislative texts of the Republic of Belarus" removed from the Criminal Code such offences as private entrepreneurial activity and brokerage, or malicious violation of the rules of administrative supervision. In the Code of Administrative Offences, article 149, making minor speculation an administrative offence, has been repealed.

Amendments made to the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus in 1994 have considerably narrowed the field of application of the death penalty. For a number of offences, prison sentences have been replaced by fines, or other measures not involving deprivation of freedom.

The legislation of the Republic of Belarus governing disputes over human rights violations, including those involving discrimination, is also being improved and brought up to date. Disputes that arise are settled in accordance with the Labour, Civil, Housing and Civil Procedure Codes, the Marriage and the Family Code, the Act of the Republic of Belarus "On pensions" and other regulatory instruments of the Republic of Belarus, the provisions of which are the basis for the decisions taken.

The Act of the Republic of Belarus "On national minorities in the Republic of Belarus", adopted on 11 November 1992, is designed to combat discrimination on grounds of nationality and incitement of enmity between different nationalities. It is based on the principles of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, the Declaration of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus "On the State sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus" and international law in the field of human rights and national minorities, establishing a legal basis in the sphere of relations between nationalities setting forth guarantees for the free development of national minorities and seeking to promote more harmonious relations between nationalities in the Republic of Belarus, the preservation and development of national minorities' cultures and the realization of their legitimate rights and interests.

The law prohibits any direct or indirect restriction of the rights and freedoms of citizens of the Republic on the grounds that they belong to a national minority and any attempt to assimilate them against their will.

Thus, in particular, no one may require a citizen of the Republic of Belarus under any circumstances to state his national origin, either orally or in writing.

No one is entitled to compel a citizen of the Republic of Belarus to prove his national origin or to renounce it (art. 4 of the Act).

Article 71 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus, which prohibits propaganda or agitation aimed at inciting racial or national enmity or discord, and also direct or indirect restriction of the rights of citizens or the establishment of direct or indirect privileges for them on the grounds of their race or nationality, is in fact a preventive measure. According to the consolidated crime statistics (form 1-G of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus) for the period in question - from 1988 to the present - no cases of criminal proceedings for such offences have been recorded in Belarus.

The situation is much the same with the offence covered by article 124 (unlawful committal to a psychiatric hospital) introduced into the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus by the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus of 4 February 1988. The statistics do not record any cases of criminal proceedings being brought since the Decree came into force on 1 March 1988. This regulatory instrument does not have

retroactive effect. Articles 55 and 56 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus governing the application of coercive measures of a medical nature to the mentally ill and patients in psychiatric hospitals appear in the general part of the Code in a new wording. They apply to persons who have committed socially dangerous acts in a state of diminished responsibility or who, before being sentenced or while serving their sentence, have become mentally ill with a condition making them unable to realize what they are doing or to control their actions. The application of coercive measures of a medical nature to such persons is a matter in which the courts alone are competent.

The Ministry of Health of the Republic of Belarus has drafted an Act "On psychiatric care", regulations on psychiatric hospitals (departments) with increased supervision, instructions on the procedure for the application of coercive and other measures of a medical nature to persons suffering from psychological disturbances who have committed socially dangerous acts and instructions on the conduct of forensic psychiatric examinations in the Republic of Belarus.

The Republic of Belarus, since it respects human rights, guarantees equal political, economic and social rights and freedoms for citizens of the Republic who consider themselves to belong to national minorities.

Article 3

The activities of national associations (unions) are forbidden if they restrict human rights, promote national, religious or racial hostility or threaten the basic principles and sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus. This provision is contained in article 11 of the above-mentioned Act.

On 9 October 1992, in Bishkek, the States participating in the CIS signed an agreement on matters connected with the restoration of the rights of deported persons, national minorities and peoples. The Republic of Belarus was one of the signatories.

The agreement condemns the former practice of forcibly resettling peoples, national minorities and individual citizens of the former USSR as contrary to the principles of common humanity.

It was recognized that the legislation and other instruments adopted by the former union, republican and local authorities and officials on forcible resettlement of peoples, national minorities and individual citizens of the former USSR were unlawful.

Deportees who voluntarily return to the place where they were living when they were deported enjoy the same political, economic and social rights and conditions with regard to installation, work, education and national, cultural and spiritual development as citizens who have lived there permanently.

Implementation of the provisions of the agreement must not infringe the rights and legitimate interests of citizens living in the areas in question.

Questions relating to the citizenship of persons resettling under the terms of the agreement are decided in accordance with national legislation, the provisions of bilateral treaties and the generally recognized principles of international law.

The necessary conditions are provided for the voluntary resettlement of such persons without hindrance, including freedom to leave the territory of one State for that of another and freedom of transit through the territory of third States (art. 3).

Citizens are guaranteed payment of pensions regardless of where the pension entitlement arose.

Article 4

Measures designed to eliminate any incitement to racial discrimination in any form and to ensure the equality of all persons before the law, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, are embodied in a number of articles of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus.

Thus, article 71 of the Code makes it a criminal offence to violate national and racial equality with a view to arousing national or racial enmity and discord, detracting from national honour and dignity, and restricting citizens' rights or establishing direct or indirect privileges for them on the grounds of their race or nationality.

In the Declaration on the State sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus adopted on 27 July 1990, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus, expressing the will of the people, confirmed the need to respect the dignity and rights of peoples of different nationalities living in the Republic, showing respect for the sovereign rights of all peoples, and declared its determination to create a State governed by the rule of law. The nation of Belarus is made up of the citizens of all the various nationalities, and State sovereignty is asserted in the name of the highest aim - free development, well-being and a decent life for every citizen on the basis of respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus and the country's international obligations. The Republic safeguards the honour, health, rights and legitimate interests of its citizens and provides them with social protection.

Article 22 of the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus declares that citizens of the Republic of Belarus are equal before the law regardless of their origin, social and property status, race and nationality, sex, education, language, attitude to religion, type and nature of occupation, place of residence, or other circumstances.

A number of instruments have been brought into force in recent years which declare the mass repression that occurred in the past to be unlawful and contrary to basic civil, social and economic human rights. They include: the regulations on the procedure for the restoration of the rights of citizens who suffered from the repression of the 1920s-1980s, confirmed by a decision of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus dated 21 December 1990; the decision of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus dated 6 June 1991

"On the procedure for the rehabilitation of victims of the political repression of the 1920s-1980s in the Republic of Belarus" and its decisions of 1 November and 23 December 1991 and 3 November 1992 on amendments and additions to the legislation regulating questions of the restoration of the rights of citizens who suffered from the repression of the 1920s-1980s; and the regulations on the procedure for the payment of compensation to victims of the political repression of the 1920s-1980s who are rehabilitated in accordance with the decisions of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus, confirmed by decision No. 759 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus dated 18 December 1992. They provide for restoration of the rights of persons illegally subjected to repression with regard to employment, pensions, housing and other matters and for the payment of compensation for loss of property and other damage.

Together with commissions set up by local councils of people's deputies and State bodies, organs of the Procurator's Office are also playing an active part in this work. In 1992, 12,985 people were rehabilitated in Belarus; the total figure for the period 1955 to 1991 was 117,870.

As far as political rights are concerned, it should be noted that under the Constitution all citizens enjoy an equal right to take part in elections, the right to be elected to the organs of State of the Republic of Belarus on the basis of universal equal and direct suffrage and the right to hold any positions in the organs of State and government of the Republic of Belarus (Act "On the State sovereignty of the Republic of Belarus", art. 5 (d), (f), (h) and (i)).

Under the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus, it is a criminal offence to hinder anyone from exercising their electoral rights or to violate the legislation on popular votes (referendums) (arts. 130 and 131.1).

In addition, under the Acts of the Republic of Belarus dated 27 October 1989 "On the election of people's deputies of the Byelorussian SSR" and "On the election of people's deputies of local soviets and people's deputies of the Byelorussian SSR", any direct or indirect restriction of the electoral rights of citizens of the Republic of Belarus on grounds of their origin, social and property status, race and nationality, sex, education, language, attitude to religion, period of residence in the place in question, or type or nature of occupation is forbidden.

Restrictions only apply to persons who have been declared by a court to be incapable, who are held in custody by decision of a court or with the approval of the Procurator or who have been committed for compulsory medical treatment by decision of a court (art. 2 of the Act).

The basic principles of the United Nations Convention are taken into account in migration policy. In the regulations on the procedure for the consideration of questions relating to the granting of asylum to foreign citizens and stateless persons adopted by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus on 25 February 1993, asylum is to be granted to persons on Belarusian territory who have been obliged to leave their country of residence because of persecution for their political or religious convictions (provided that their views are not liable to promote hostility between peoples or to

result in harm to people's health), or on the grounds of their nationality. Questions relating to the granting of asylum are dealt with irrespective of race or nationality, sex or education.

Of great importance in the sphere of human rights is the Act of the Republic of Belarus of 17 December 1922 "On freedom of religion and religious organizations", which emphasizes the equality of citizens in all fields of civil, political, economic, social and cultural life regardless of their attitude to religion. Direct or indirect restriction of citizens' rights or establishment of any privileges for them on the grounds of their attitude to religion is an offence under the law, as is incitement of enmity or hatred on those grounds or demeaning of citizens because of their religious convictions. Jewish, Muslim and other religious associations of national minorities operate freely in the Republic.

The Republic of Belarus, respecting human rights, guarantees citizens of the Republic of Belarus who regard themselves as belonging to national minorities equal political, economic and social rights and freedoms, including: the right to receive assistance from the State in the development of their national culture and education; the right to study and use their native language; the right to print and disseminate information in their native language; the right to profess any religion and to perform national and ritual ceremonies in their native language (Act "On national minorities in the Republic of Belarus", art. 5 (a), (b), (c) and (e)).

The requirements of the above-mentioned United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination have been reflected in all areas of Belarusian law, including labour legislation. The Code of Labour Laws, with the amendments and additions made by the Supreme Council on 15 December 1992, embodies a set of rules aiming at the complete elimination of racial discrimination. Thus, in particular, article 6 of the Code of Labour Laws gives workers equal rights with regard to:

1. Work and free use of one's capacity for work.

2. Freedom to form trade unions.

3. Collective negotiation.

4. Strike action.

5. Assembly.

6. Participation in the management of enterprises.

7. Sharing in the enterprise's profits in cases provided for by law and by its articles.

8. Healthy and safe working conditions.

9. Respect for their privacy and personal dignity.

10. Fair remuneration for their work and prompt payment.

11. Daily and weekly time off, public holidays and leave for periods not less than those specified in the Code of Labour Laws.

12. Social security, pensions and benefits in the event of occupational disease, disablement and redundancy.

Article 6-1 of the Code of Labour Laws prohibits discrimination in employment and in work relations on grounds of nationality, sex, race, language, religious or political views, participation or non-participation in trade unions and other communal associations, or physical or psychological defects which do not prevent the person from performing the functions required by his employment.

Questions relating to the employment of the population are regulated in a similar way by the Act of the Republic of Belarus "On the employment of the population of the Republic of Belarus", which came into force on 1 January 1993. Under this Act, all citizens of the Republic of Belarus who are fit to work are entitled to equal opportunities for exercising their right to work regardless of race, sex, attitude to religion, age, political convictions, nationality or social status.

Anyone who violates the legislation in force is liable to administrative and criminal proceedings. Thus, under article 41 of the Code of Administrative Offences, officials who violate labour legislation and the rules on the protection of labour are liable to a fine. According to the Criminal Code, unlawful dismissal of an employee for personal motives, failure to comply with a court decision on reinstatement in employment, and similarly any deliberate substantial violation of the labour legislation committed by an official of a State or public enterprise, administration or organization is punishable by corrective labour.

Councils of people's deputies, the appropriate State organs and trade unions are responsible for monitoring compliance with the legislation on employment of the population.

Since the Act "On amendments and additions to the Code of Labour Laws of the Republic of Belarus" came into force earlier this year, a number of categories of manual and non-manual workers have benefited from the abolition of a discriminatory procedure introduced at the end of the 1920s, under which labour disputes on matters relating to dismissal, transfer to other work and the imposition of disciplinary sanctions were dealt with by such workers' hierarchical superiors. Now their individual labour disputes on questions relating to the application of legislative and other instruments on work, collective agreements and other work agreements, if any, will be considered by labour dispute commissions and the courts.

Under the first part of article 9 of the Act "On national minorities in the Republic of Belarus", communal and cultural organizations of national minorities can set up their own cultural and educational institutions using their own resources.

The Republic of Belarus guarantees citizens the right to establish cultural ties with their compatriots living outside the Republic of Belarus, the right to preserve their national traditions and to develop professional and amateur art.

Article 5

Under the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, all citizens of the Republic of Belarus are equal before the law and accordingly are equally entitled to protection of their rights and freedoms regardless of their national or social origin, language, sex, political or other convictions, religion, place of residence, property status or other circumstances. Restriction of the individual's rights and freedoms is only permitted in the cases specified by law, in the interests of national security, public order, morality, public health, and the rights and freedoms of others (Constitution, arts. 22 and 23).

Under the Constitution every person has the right to life. The State protects people from any unlawful threats to their lives (art. 24) and guarantees the freedom, inviolability and dignity of the human person. No one may be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art. 25).

Under article 26 no one can be found guilty of a crime unless his guilt has been proved. An accused person is not required to prove his innocence. Article 27 states that no one can be obliged to give evidence or explanations against himself, members of his family or near relations.

The Constitution also guarantees the inviolability of correspondence and the home, freedom of movement, religion, opinion, conviction, assembly and association.

Apart from the Constitution, the equality of all persons before the law and the observance by the State of civil and political rights are guaranteed by a number of legislative instruments such as the Act on Trade Unions (dated 22 April 1992), the National Housing Programme (adopted by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus on 24 February 1994), and the acts on health protection, pensions, social security for the disabled, the rights of the child, the general principles of State policy with regard to youth, and so on.

Article 6

The legislation currently in force in the Republic of Belarus contains provisions governing the examination of complaints against unlawful actions by State bodies and officials that infringe the rights of citizens.

The Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus has provided the following explanation in this respect: "Complaints may be lodged with the courts against any actions by State bodies and officials as a result of which citizens are deprived of the possibility of exercising, in full or in part, the rights accorded to them by the law or by other regulatory instruments, or against any duty unlawfully imposed upon them."

Complaints may be submitted to the courts by citizens who consider that their rights have been violated, by their representatives or, at the request of a citizen, by a duly authorized representative of a public organization or labour collective.

Under article 104 of the Code of Civil Procedure of the Republic of Belarus, the government procurator is entitled to appeal to the court on behalf of citizens against unlawful actions by State bodies and officials (paras. 4, 7 and 8 of resolution No. 12 adopted by the plenum of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Belarus on 4 September 1992).

In conformity with the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, recognizing the competence of the Human Rights Committee, which was ratified by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus on 10 January 1992, the citizens of Belarus are entitled to submit complaints to the Committee regarding unlawful actions by State organs.

Article 7

A. Education and teaching

The structure of the country's education system is described in chapter P, article 14, of the Act of the Republic of Belarus "On education in the Republic of Belarus", adopted by the Supreme Council on 29 October 1991:

> "All State and non-State educational and training establishments on the territory of the Republic of Belarus form part of the country's national educational system, including:
>
> - Pre-school education;
> - General primary and secondary education;
> - Extramural education and training;
> - Vocational and technical training;
> - Higher education;
> - Training of scientists and teachers;
> - Further training and retraining;
> - Individual education."

The unity and coherence of the educational system are ensured through the coordination of curricula and programmes, continuity in the levels and forms of education, and the creation of educational institutions combining different types of education.

As stated in the above-mentioned Act, one of the aims of the educational system in the Republic of Belarus is the development and strengthening of a national consciousness among citizens of the Republic of Belarus and a feeling

of respect towards other countries and peoples of the world (art. 4, para. 3), together with the preservation and increase of the intellectual property and cultural assets of the Belarusian people and other national communities within the country (art. 4, para. 5). According to article 7, first part, education and training in the Republic of Belarus are based on the cultural traditions and values of the Belarusian people and other national communities within the Republic and on the achievements of a world culture.

In keeping with its legislation, the Republic of Belarus fosters the creation of the material conditions necessary for the development of education and culture among national minorities through allocations from the State budget (art. 7 of the Act "On national minorities in the Republic of Belarus", dated 11 November 1992).

The subject of mutual relations among national, racial and ethnic groups is included in the curricula of schools and teacher training establishments.

For example, these questions are reflected in the curricula of primary and secondary schools by the following courses:

- The individual and the world (forms 1 to 4);
- My country - Belarus (form 4);
- The individual and society (forms 8 to 11).

These courses provide information on the culture and historical traditions of all peoples living on the territory of Belarus.

Teacher training includes a general course on religious knowledge as well as courses on philosophy as a broad range of different world outlooks, the history of world culture and Belarusian studies.

Due attention is given in the educational and teaching process to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

B. Culture

The aim of the legislation on culture is to revive and develop Belarusian national culture and the cultures of the national communities of Belarus as an integral part of the universal human culture (art. 2, para. 2, of the Act of the Republic of Belarus "On culture in the Republic of Belarus"). Individuals belonging to any nationality or ethnic group residing on the territory of the Republic of Belarus are guaranteed the right to develop their culture and language and to establish national schools, enterprises or cultural institutions (theatres, museums, publishing houses, etc.). Citizens of the Republic of Belarus belonging to any nationality or ethnic group have the right to form cultural unions, associations, societies for the promotion of culture and national cultural centres (art. 10 of the above-mentioned Act).

The Republic of Belarus ensures that the State is involved in promoting the free development and use of all national languages used by the inhabitants of the Republic (art. 2, fourth part, of the Act of 26 January 1990 "On languages in the Republic of Belarus"). The State creates the necessary conditions for the exercise of the right to education and instruction in the native languages of the inhabitants of the Republic, whatever their nationality (art. 22, second part, of the Act on languages).

State institutions in the field of culture and art contribute to the development of the culture, language, traditions, customs and rituals of national minorities and assist national and cultural societies in organizing their educational activities. Such cultural institutions provide a forum for amateur national groups of creative artists. National festivals of folk art and cinema and art exhibitions are organized jointly. Theatres put on plays in national languages. A number of newspapers founded by national societies receive partial financing. National libraries have created special collections of literature in the languages of national minorities. June 1994 saw the opening of a Centre for National Cultures with the status of a State Cultural Institution of the Republic.

With a view to fostering mutual understanding among nationalities and cultures, and tolerance and friendship among nations and racial or ethnic groups, the Republic of Belarus has concluded a number of agreements on cooperation in the field of culture with Lithuania, Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia and other countries.

Article 1 of the "Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Culture between the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus and the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine" stipulates that "the parties, acting within their powers and possibilities and on the basis of the laws of the Republic of Belarus and Ukraine, undertake to create the best possible conditions for cultural cooperation between the Republic of Belarus and Ukraine, to join their efforts with a view to broadening mutual exchanges of the cultural works of their peoples, nations and ethnic groups residing within their territories, and to foster the cultural identity of the Belarusian and Ukrainian peoples, including those living on each other's territories".

There are similar articles in all of the bilateral agreements concluded by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus. It is also provided (art. 2 of the Agreement with Lithuania) that "the parties shall use all possible means and provide each other with mutual support in creating the best possible conditions for satisfying the national cultural needs of Lithuanian national groups in Belarus and Belarusian national groups in Lithuania".

The Republic of Belarus has signed the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Culture with the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Tashkent, 15 May 1992), the Convention on Culture and Cooperation in the Fields of Science and Information among the Countries of the Black Sea Region (Istanbul, 6 March 1993), and the Declaration of the Governments of the Republic of Belarus and the Republic of Poland on Cooperation in the Fields of Culture, Science and Education (18 November 1992).

These documents reflect in one way or another the commitment of the participating States to the development of the culture of peoples living on their territory and to guaranteeing their equal right to participation in cultural life.

In Belarus, not only the legal, but also the social and psychological conditions have been created to provide an organizational framework for the development of the cultures of national minorities in the form of national cultural unions, societies and associations. Activity among social groupings of national minorities has tended to increase considerably, together with their determination to acquire a certain amount of cultural autonomy and to promote group identity and national consciousness.

The following groups are currently registered in the Republic of Belarus:

1. Union of Poles in Belarus (Grodno) with a regional office at Postavy in the Vitebsk region (1991), Romuald Traugutt Society for the Promotion of Polish Culture (1990), "Polonia" Polish Cultural Society in the Mogilev region and elsewhere, and the Minsk city office of the Union of Poles of Belarus

2. Belarusian Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities (with various subdivisions and branch offices) and City Society for Jewish Culture in Minsk

3. "Al-Kitab" Association of Tatar Muslims

4. "Gobustan" Belarus-Azerbaijan Inter-Republican Society

5. "Aiastan" Society for the Promotion of Armenian Culture, Minsk

6. "Vatra" Association of Ukrainians in Belarus

7. "Rus" Society for Russian Culture, Minsk

8. "Moldova" Society

9. "Vozrozhdenie" Belarusian Centre for German Culture

10. Minsk Korean Association

11. Belarusian-Lithuanian Union

Consideration is currently being given to the creation of a public council of representatives of all national minorities, to be entrusted with the task of fully depoliticizing community organizations and uniting their efforts to solve cultural development problems.

Social groupings of national minorities play an active role in promoting the study of their national languages and cultural traditions and the history

of their peoples. A number of these societies have set up and currently operate Sunday schools, courses and optional classes for the study of Polish, German, Tatar, Korean, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Moldovan (Romanian), Ukrainian and Ivrit.

Mutual understanding in the field of culture is enhanced by extensive academic research on the development and interaction of national, regional and ethnic cultures. The Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Belarus and other research centres are working on large-scale research projects on the problems of relations between nationalities and the language situation, on the problems of national consciousness and the study of frontier cultures. At the end of 1994 and beginning of 1995, Minsk plans to host an international seminar-workshop entitled "Nations, Frontiers, Destinies-II".

C. Information policy

In spite of the difficult economic and financial situation, the Government has found ways to support national book and newspaper publication, radio and television. The Act "On languages in the Republic of Belarus" and the Act "On national minorities in the Republic of Belarus" provide for equal opportunities with respect to access to information by the representatives of all nationalities living in the Republic. The Ministry of Information has not refused to register a single publication since it came into existence in May 1992. As of 1 August 1994, 147 publications had been registered in Belarusian, 137 in Belarusian and Russian, 34 in Belarusian and other languages, 170 in Russian, 133 in Russian and Belarusian, 58 in Russian and other languages, 4 in Polish and 2 in Ukrainian.

The Supreme Council of the Republic of Belarus has adopted the draft Act of the Republic of Belarus "On the press and other mass media" on first reading. This Act provides for equal opportunities with respect to the dissemination and use of information by representatives of all nationalities residing in the country.

Since March 1993, Belarusian television has been broadcasting the programme "Mnogogolosye", in which the participants are representatives of national minorities living in Belarus. The subjects are prepared in their native languages. The programme is broadcast twice a month.

The Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus has developed and prepared for broad discussion a draft project for the development of the information sector in the Republic of Belarus based on the principle of freedom of the mass media as a guarantee of human freedom and the democratic development of society. This document stresses that the Republic of Belarus adheres to the "Free Press Charter" and will be guided by its principles.